



SETTING AND ACHIEVING YOUR NEW YEAR'S GOALS

Pick an ancient civilization, a modern national culture or an ethnic identity from anywhere on the globe. Regardless of what tradition you chose, chances are it has a well-established set of rituals around the coming of the New Year. Humans seem to have a universal tendency to view the birth of each year as an opportunity for renewal and self-improvement.

For many of us, nothing exemplifies this spirit more than the time-honored tradition of making New Year's resolutions. By some estimates, more than 100 million Americans make resolutions each December. Of all these goals, the most popular relate to weight loss, physical exercise and smoking cessation. Other top-ranking resolutions center around money management and the reduction of personal debt.

THE CHALLENGE IS KEEPING THEM

Unfortunately, not all New Year's resolutions succeed as well, or as quickly, as their authors might have wished. In fact, research shows that only 46% of all New Year's resolutions are maintained after the first six months of the year, and more than 80% of yearly goals are ultimately not realized.

How do those who *do* meet their New Year's goals do it? They seem to have practiced a simple set of *goal setting techniques* that set them up for success – and then followed through by sticking to an equally simple set of *goal accomplishment strategies*.

Here are some tips that can help you make New Year's resolutions that work – and have staying power.

SETTING YOUR GOALS

- » Define your goals diligently. Resolutions should be realistic, achievable, specific and measurable. Set yourself up for success by focusing on your *most important and achievable* goals. Then, make a shortlist of the ones that are *most likely to work*. Share your goals with trusted friends and family, so they can support you as you work to achieve them.
- » Don't stop with the goal – make a *plan for how you are going to achieve each one*. As you plan, understand that achieving a goal may mean paying a price. If necessary, adjust your goal and your plan so that the sacrifice is realistic.
- » Research shows that *breaking a large goal into gradual, short-term goals* is easier and more likely to lead to success – so use this strategy in your achievement plan. Divide your goals into manageable chunks, and set a deadline for each sub-goal.
- » Determine beforehand how you will handle obstacles or challenges. For example, what will you do when you crave a cigarette, or when someone offers you a slice of cake?

FOLLOWING THROUGH

- » Plan to reward yourself for success. Define in advance what achievements along your path you will consider successes, and how you will reward yourself when you attain them. Consider celebrating your successes publicly, because the support of others is itself a powerful incentive.
- » Be realistic and gentle with yourself. Don't set the bar too high, and don't think in terms of perfection and failure. Be prepared for setbacks, and accept them as part of your overall success trajectory.
- » Persevere. Experts have suggested that it takes 21 days to make a habit. As much as possible, strive to do your goal work at the same time and place each day. Build "backup plans" into your plan, so that if things don't go as intended you'll still be motivated to keep going.

- » Get support from positive people. You will be far more likely to succeed if you have some encouragement. Find friends or colleagues with similar goals, and work together.

Remember: As an MHN member you have access to a full spectrum of telephonic consultations and other EAP services (see sidebar) that can help you set meaningful, realistic goals for the New Year – and achieve them! To learn more, log on to **www.members.mhn.com**.

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for legal or financial advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.

Making and keeping personal goals can be a challenge, even for the most highly motivated of us. Your EAP can help:

- » If you've resolved to finally organize tasks you've been putting off – such as household maintenance, auto repairs or personal fitness – your EAP can provide telephonic consultation and referrals to consultants and businesses that can help with everyday needs.
- » For resolutions regarding legal and financial issues, your EAP can provide valuable telephonic consultations. Network attorneys or mediators can help with civil, consumer, personal and family law, financial matters, business law, real estate, estate planning and more. Financial counselors can help with credit counseling, debt and budgeting assistance, tax planning, financial planning for college and retirement and specialized tax assistance.
- » Concerned about your personal wellness? MHN's Online Member Services (OMS) offer valuable tools, tips and resources that can help you get fit, eat well, quit smoking and develop healthy lifestyle habits.

**For more information, call
(866) EAP-4SOC
(866) 327-4762**

TDD callers, please dial (800) 327-0801

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www.eap4soc.mhn.com
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